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SPECIAL REPORT

INDIA'S REVAMPED DEFENSE POSTURE

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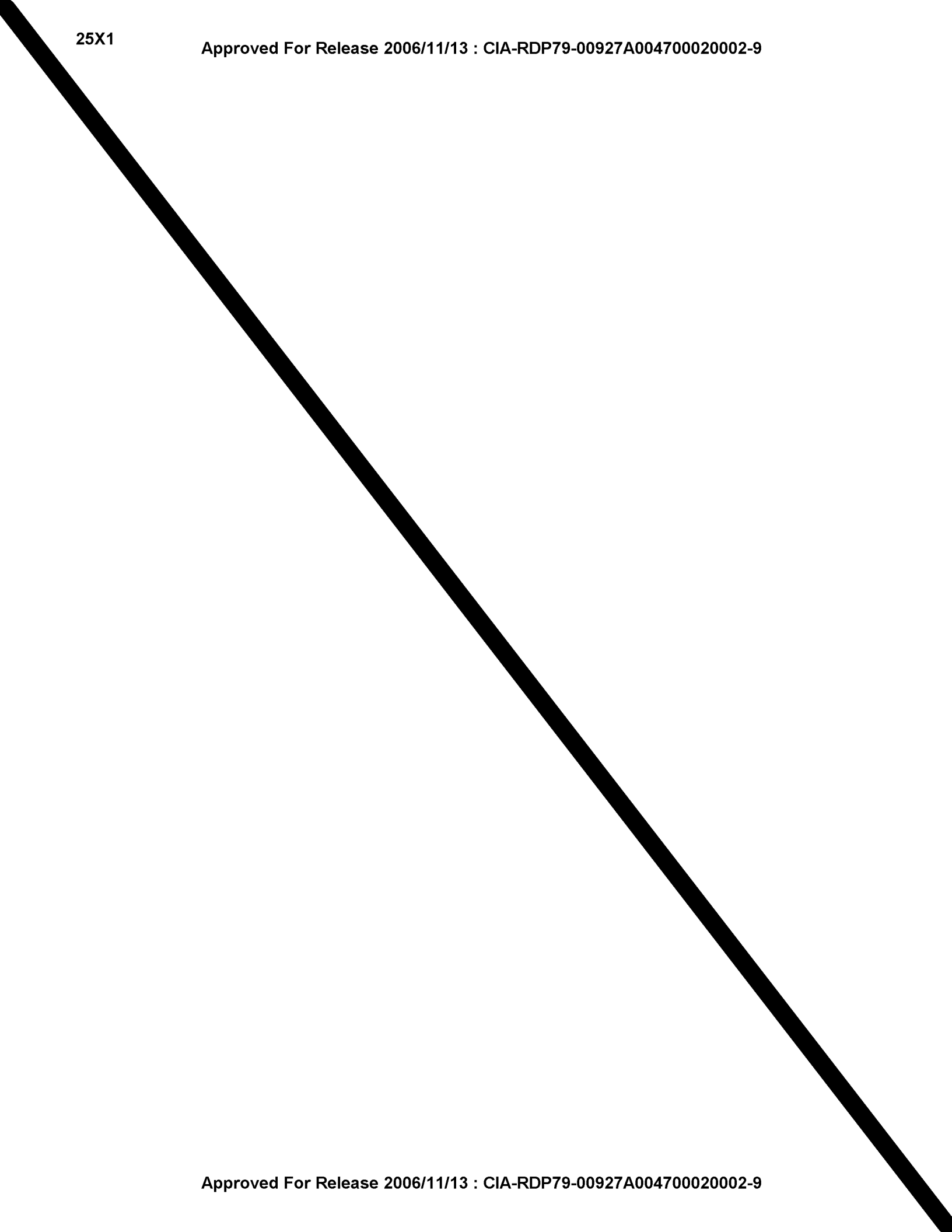

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INDIA'S REVAMPED DEFENSE POSTURE

Since the Indian Army's humiliating defeat by the Chinese Communist forces in the month-long mountain fighting in the fall of 1962, India's leaders have turned with emotional intensity to the task of building a force which could meet and defeat a new Chinese attack, and possibly even win back the lost territory. Shibboleths of Indian foreign policy, such as the refusal to accept foreign military help, were temporarily dropped in whole or part, and vast quantities of new men and more powerful equipment have been put into the army's hands. The impressive flow of men and materiel, however, may conceal deficiencies in strategic thinking, training, and leadership which could undercut the whole effort of the past two years. Now, of course, the explosion of the Chinese nuclear device has introduced a new unsettling factor into the strategic problem as the Indians see it.

Aftermath of Defeat

The Sino-Indian fighting--culminating in China's unilateral cease-fire on 20 November 1962 and subsequent troop pullback--forced some major shifts in India's basic political-military thinking. Since independence and the partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947, India's government and army had been heavily preoccupied with Pakistan and the Kashmir dispute. Now, suddenly, a new, more powerful challenge was coming from Communist China. As New Delhi saw it, there was no alternative but to prepare for the possibility of a two-front war, against China as well as Pakistan.

The experience also forced Indian Army leaders, still resting on World War II laurels, to admit that they had a far less effective fighting force than they had supposed.

Since the fall of 1962, India has tried to repair the deficiencies in its defense establishment principally by expanding its forces--with major emphasis on the army--and by providing them with more modern and more powerful equipment.

Manpower Expansion

Limited measures to strengthen the Indian Army had already been in progress since the mid-1950s, originally in response to the US program of military assistance to Pakistan. After China crushed the revolt in Tibet and occupied it in force in 1959, incidents along the Sino-Indian border multiplied, and India accelerated its military expansion program. Army manpower had risen from

about 400,000 in 1959 to 550,-000 by late 1962.

After the Chinese attacks, however, this pace seemed much too slow, and a crash program was begun to recruit and train whole new divisions. In the past two years, over 300,000 new recruits have been inducted. The Indian Army is using these recruits--together with existing battalions not previously subordinated to divisional command--to increase the number of divisions from 10 in 1962 to 16 today, with 20 projected for late 1965. To provide leadership for this force, the army has commissioned 10,000 new officers during the last two years.

Apart from this over-all expansion program, the Fourth Division, a supposedly crack outfit which fell apart before the Chinese onslaught on India's northeast frontier, has had to be remanned, restaffed, reorganized, re-equipped, and retrained, practically from scratch.

The Equipment Problem

The provision of better equipment has also received major emphasis. The effort here has been three-pronged: to secure foreign military assistance, to increase defense production at home, and to improve a number of the supply routes to the nearly inaccessible positions along the Himalayan frontier.

Here again basic rethinking was required. Before 1962 New Delhi had regarded the acceptance of foreign military assistance as incompatible with its nonaligned foreign policy, and attention was concentrated on building up a domestic munitions industry. The Nehru government took great pride in purchasing, in straight commercial transactions, those items, such as modern aircraft, which it could not yet produce for itself. Equipment requirements, moreover, were determined mainly by New Delhi's estimate of the threat from Pakistan.

After 1959, when border patrol clashes along the Sino-Indian frontier became a matter of increasing concern, New Delhi began buying Soviet transport aircraft and helicopters to supply the border, paying for them in rupee credits. But aside from accepting soft terms, Nehru still was not moved to take a hard look at his longstanding policy of refusing foreign military aid.

Immediately after the Chinese attack, however, the Nehru regime abandoned at least temporarily many of its sacred cows in the foreign policy field. The government was not only stunned by the total collapse of its policy of determined friendship toward China despite border problems, but it was demoralized by what it regarded as its own powerlessness to prevent the Chinese Army from debouching from the hills onto the plains of northeast India. And how, officials asked themselves, would India's masses react if the Chinese bombed New Delhi or Calcutta?

Ready to believe that every Chinese soldier stood seven feet tall, India welcomed the speedily organized airlift of US and UK

equipment. No comparably speedy response was forthcoming from Moscow, Khrushchev being preoccupied with the Cuban missile crisis. By early 1963, however, the USSR was again ready to aid India against China, and Nehru was able to reconcile military aid with his nonalignment policy by securing help from both the West and the USSR.

The most pressing equipment requirements of the battalions still in the field in late 1962 included such unglamorous items as arctic clothing and goggles, lubricants that would not jam a weapon in freezing weather, radios for units isolated by some of the world's most rugged terrain, and light-weight mortars capable of delivering heavy punch. Such equipment was delivered by the West, but the fighting ended before much of it could be moved to the front line.

Air defense has also been given high priority. Throughout the 1962 fighting, New Delhi had refused to use its Canberra jet bombers or its jet fighter-bombers in interdiction or ground support roles for fear of escalating the war and provoking Chinese air attacks on Indian cities. Since then, high-quality early warning and fire-control radar has been secured from the West. In 1963, US and UK jet interceptor units were even allowed to conduct exercises in India with the Indian Air Force.

The implications of such "alignment" with the West were difficult for Nehru to swallow, however, and he was soon assuring the public that India remained dedicated to becoming self-sufficient in air defense, too. In the meantime, to preserve its nonaligned position, New Delhi has turned mainly to Moscow for high-performance jet fighters--the MIG-21--and for surface-to-air missiles--the SA-2. The latter are scheduled to be in place by late 1965 to protect Calcutta, New Delhi, and the key airlift center at Chandigarh, north of New Delhi.

To expand its own defense production, India is adding 13 new munitions plants, which make everything from side arms ammunition to armor and heavy artillery, doubling the number of such factories in India two years ago. One of the largest single items of US military aid delivered so far is a complete ordnance factory. In three widely separated cities, plants are being built which together will be used to assemble an estimated 90 MIG-21s by the end of 1969 (50 additional MIG-21s are to be delivered from the USSR). Many MIG components will remain beyond India's production capabilities, however, so these Soviet-supplied plants contribute to India's self-sufficiency more in appearance than in actuality.

Supply Routes

New Delhi began to develop its own feeder routes on the south scarp of the Himalayas in 1959. At that time, greater attention was given to improving a few strategic roads, largely with Tibetan refugee labor.

Since 1962, however, a much more determined effort has been

made to build new roads in the mountains and to improve old ones. The road from Kashmir to the Ladakh front is being steadily improved. In the winter, however, supplying this front continues by airlift only. Other roads are being pushed at various points into the Himalayas north of New Delhi, in Sikkim, Bhutan, and the Northeast Frontier Agency (NEFA). The eastern tip of NEFA, however, still relies primarily on air supply the year round.

The roads go to key points which must be held, e.g., a relatively defensible mountain pass or a narrowing of a gorge. These points are far enough back from the present Chinese border positions to require the Chinese to extend their own lines of supply, but still deep enough into the range to keep the Chinese far from the heavily populated plains. This marks a shift from the Indian strategy of 1962, which was to attempt to hold at the border.

Financial Strains

All this force-feeding of men and equipment into the defense establishment has of course required a marked increase in defense expenditures. In 1962--prior to the Chinese attack--India allotted $780 million, or 15 percent of the national budget for defense; today it allots $1.8 billion, or 23 percent of the budget. The immediate economic penalties have been further lags in the five-year development plan and sharp rises in the cost of living.

Competition between the services promises to result in further expenditures that are probably not justified by India's real defense needs. As the army and air force have gotten all the new equipment, the navy has felt slighted even though it is already strong enough to overwhelm Pakistan's navy and would have little to do in a new Himalyan campaign.

Unanswered Questions

New Delhi may still be deceiving itself, at least to some degree, as to its strength relative to the Chinese. Although it has made and is making strenuous efforts to expand and reequip its fighting forces, more men and better equipment may not preclude further humiliation at the hands of the Chinese in the event of a new attack. Because the Indian military leaders, feeling that their honor has been stained, find it easier to blame equipment deficiencies rather than their failures of leadership or morale, some of the problems which came to light in 1962 may be getting too little attention. These deficiencies seem to be primarily in the areas of quality of command personnel and in the type of training the Indian Army now is undergoing.

It is difficult for Indian leaders even to consider that there may be some serious deficiencies running through much of the officer corps, but this may well be the case. Certain

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were quickly weeded out following their dramatically

inadequate performances in 1962. But many other deficient officers, less prominent than the scapegoats, are probably still in command functions.

Standards had to be lowered to find the 10,000 new officers created over the last two years. With the need so great, many who should have been weeded out have been commissioned, and many others have of necessity been quickly promoted to responsibilities beyond their experience.

The qualities of Indian military leaders relate closely to the quality and kind of training they are providing for themselves and their subordinates. In 1962, Indian generals who should have thought in terms of deploying divisions focused their attention on battalions. They had never, except on paper, conducted division-size maneuvers, these being too expensive. Their inexperience contributed to the chaos and confusion that followed China's surprise attack. But large-scale maneuvers are still expensive, especially when so much money is being spent on expansion and re-equipment, and Indian generals have yet to conduct field exercises above the brigade level, although the newly reconstituted Fourth Division recently deployed to the hills for exercises and testing of new organizational concepts.

Key reserve divisions are being organized and trained far from the Himalayan heights in terrain free from snow and much less rugged. Until elements from these divisions are rotated into the two- and three-mile-high country on the border they will go unacclimatized. Meanwhile, even the Chinese reserve troops, being stationed on the Tibetan plateau, the "roof of the world," are already in an altitude like that in which they may fight.

Although New Delhi gladly welcomes equipment from abroad, it flatly refuses--for reasons of pride--foreign training in India, except in the technical use of imported equipment. While it is sending officers abroad for specialist training, it declines training in basic tactics and staff procedures, fields in which the Indian Army remains relatively archaic.

In improving its logistical capabilities, Indian attention seems too strongly focused on the development of roads and airlift capability. Little stress appears to be placed on developing trail nets and preparing to employ large numbers of Indian laborers or peasants to move in supplies as the Chinese do in the mountain area. There seems to be some danger that the Indian Army, compared with the Chinese, remains relatively roadbound.

This might result in repeating the experience of 1962, when the Chinese on more than one occasion overcame the difficulties of terrain and launched a

demoralizing attack from some unexpected quarter because they brought more equipment farther and faster than Indian defenders at first thought possible.

Finally, while there are more and better equipped troops available to defend India, it is difficult to conclude that these troops are of better quality than in 1962.

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Just as India's new strategy of holding only certain key points might collapse if the fighting qualities of the troops fall short, its plan to bring air power to bear in ground support and interdiction roles may be subject to change in the light of China's recent nuclear test. This event has added a new and unsettling factor into India's strategic thinking, particularly with regard to the use of its air power and the value of its air defenses.

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